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ABSTRACT

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) is one of 10 regional educational labs funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Since 1984, NCREL has been providing research-based resources and assistance to educators, policymakers, and communities in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The primary purpose of NCREL's Center for Literacy is to improve the reading achievement of all students by providing assistance to diverse educational entities in defining and implementing research-based best practices in literacy. The Center for Literacy's scope of work proposes activities that include research, policy, and practice. These activities are designed to improve literacy and literacy instruction throughout NCREL's seven-state region. In connection with these activities, the Center for Literacy established a Regional Literacy Network (RLN) to facilitate information sharing and collaboration in addressing the literacy needs and critical issues across NCREL's region. The network comprises literacy teams that include representatives from state education agencies, universities, district and school administrators, curriculum specialists, and elementary and secondary educators. The second annual meeting of the RLN was held on April 25, 2002, at NCREL's facility in Naperville, Illinois. This report outlines the meeting and its activities. The report is divided into the following sections: Introduction (About NCREL; Center for Literacy; Regional Literacy Network); Morning Session (Welcome; Keynote Address: Bonnie B. Armbruster; No Child Left Behind Discussions; AACTE Reading Update; Literacy Product Review; Regional Literacy Network E-Mail List); Afternoon Session (Cross-States Collaborative Activities; Evaluation and Conclusion); and a reference. (NKA)

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Working Together for Literacy Success

Report of the Regional Literacy Network Annual Meeting

April 25, 2002

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Report of the Regional Literacy Network Annual Meeting

April 25, 2002

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Report of the annual meeting of the Regional Literacy Network

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We would like to express appreciation to Dr. Bonnie B. Armbruster of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the keynote address. Also, special thanks to the members of the Regional Literacy Network for their input and collaboration on critical issues in literacy and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

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Introduction

About NCREL

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) is one of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping schools—and the students they serve—reach their full potential.

Since 1984, NCREL has been providing research-based resources and assistance to educators, policymakers, and communities in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Its Midwest region is home to more than 20 percent of the nation's schools, teachers, and students. The ultimate goal of NCREL is to help its clients apply proven practices to create productive schools where all students can develop their skills and abilities. NCREL draws on the latest research and best practices to strengthen and support schools and communities to achieve this goal.

Center for Literacy

The primary purpose of NCREL's Center for Literacy is to improve the reading achievement of all students by providing assistance to schools, districts, education service agencies, and state education agencies in defining and implementing research-based best practices in literacy. NCREL's literacy staff identifies resources, develops materials, and helps schools in improving the reading achievement of all students. When appropriate, technology is used to support these efforts.

Regional Literacy Network

The Center for Literacy's scope of work proposes activities that include research, policy, and practice. These activities are designed to improve literacy and literacy instruction throughout NCREL's seven-state region. In connection with these activities, the Center for Literacy established a Regional Literacy Network (RLN) to facilitate information sharing and collaboration in addressing the literacy needs and critical issues across NCREL's region.

The network comprises literacy teams that include representatives from state education agencies, universities, district and school administrators, curriculum specialists, and elementary and secondary educators.

The second annual meeting of the RLN was held on April 25, 2002, at NCREL's facility in Naperville, Illinois. The theme for the meeting was "Working Together for Literacy Success."

The goals and outcomes of the RLN annual meeting were as follows:

Goal:

To broaden understanding and knowledge of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Outcomes:

Network members will learn about the various initiatives within the region related to the legislation.

Individuals will communicate this information to their schools, districts, and states.

Goal:

To support literacy achievement through collaboration by forming networks, either across states or in state groups.

Outcome:

Network members will collaborate on self-designed activities.

Goal:

To determine literacy needs that will inform NCREL's professional development work.

Outcome:

Network members will broaden their understanding of critical issues.

Morning Session

Welcome

NCREL's Executive Director Gina Burkhardt welcomed the group and thanked them for coming together to collaborate and share their knowledge and expertise in ensuring literacy success for all students. She stressed the importance of literacy educators working together now more than ever as they begin to implement the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and analyze the impact of the legislation.

Dr. Edyth Young, director of the Center for Literacy, also expressed her appreciation for the group's participation in the meeting and provided an overview of the program planned for the day. She then introduced the keynote speaker, Professor Bonnie B. Armbruster, Ph.D., Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Keynote Address

Dr. Armbruster was one of the writers for *Put Reading First*, a publication that supports the Reading First program, an early literacy component of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. "This is the largest and yet the most focused of reading initiatives to be passed by any administration, so that is a significant factor for us," she noted. "The purpose of Reading First, of course, is to get every child from kindergarten through third grade reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade."

She went on to say, "A key emphasis of the Reading First program is that all the practices and programs implemented should be very firmly based on scientifically based research. So 'scientifically based research' is a term you are going to be hearing a lot about for the next few years.

"The previous administration—the Clinton administration—had gotten together a panel to do a synthesis of scientifically based research in the area of reading. [As a result,] in April of 2000, the National Reading Panel report [*Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*] was published. What the National Reading Panel had done was to sift through some 100,000 studies of reading instruction. They culled out those they thought were the most worthy or that had the strongest scientific support for practices or programs that should be implemented in classrooms," explained Dr. Armbruster.

"Now this is somewhat controversial, because not everybody agrees that they included everything that was worthy of being included, that is, that their focus might have been a bit narrow on what constitutes scientifically based research. But the research they did look at used an experimental and quasi-experimental design to show the strongest positive evidence for the effectiveness of the particular program."

She added, "At any rate, the report of the National Reading Panel has now become the basis of what the Bush administration is using as criteria for scientifically based reading

research. So, according to the National Reading Panel, there are five key elements of reading instruction."

Dr. Armbruster defined those elements as follows:

Phonemic Awareness

- This is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words.
- Phonemic awareness is a part of phonological awareness.

Phonics

- This is the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the sounds (phonemes) of spoken language.
- Phonics instruction is teaching children these letter-sound relationships.

Fluency

- Oral reading fluency is the ability to read with accuracy, and with an appropriate rate, expression, and phrasing.

Vocabulary

- Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- Vocabulary plays an important part in learning to read. Children use words in their oral vocabulary to make sense of the words they see in print.
- Vocabulary is also important in reading comprehension. Readers cannot understand what they are reading unless they know what most of the words mean.

Text Comprehension

- Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading.
- Instruction in comprehension can help students understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read.
- Research on text comprehension suggests **what** should be taught about text comprehension and **how** it should be taught.

Dr. Armbruster concluded by reiterating that these five major components are what the government will be looking for in the programs and practices being implemented in the classroom.

No Child Left Behind Discussions

Following a question and answer session with Dr. Armbruster, participants divided into groups by grade level (K-3, 4-8, 9-12) to discuss the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

The following questions were given to those who participated in the K-3 discussion group:

- What components are already in place in your district/state that support the new legislation?
- What particular points from the law are of the most concern to you?
- What discussions need to take place in your building/district/state in order to implement the new legislation?
- What type of professional development needs to occur around the legislation?

The following questions were given to those who participated in the Grades 4-8 and 9-12 groups:

- What components are already in place in your district/state, which support the new legislation?
- How is your district/state addressing the following components of this legislation?

  1. K-12 reading standards.
  2. Alignment of reading/language arts testing with the state standards:

     A. Grades 3-8 yearly.
     B. Once in Grades 9-12.
     C. English language learners yearly.
     D. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to Grades 4 and 8 every other year.
     E. Reporting of disaggregated test scores—major racial and ethnic groups, major income groups, students with a disability, students with limited English proficiency, and migrant students.
     F. Reporting scores to the public.

  3. Teacher quality (professional development and certificate).

In responding to the questions, participants in each group shared information and concerns related to the implementation of the act and its impact in their school district or state. Upon reassembling, a spokesperson for each group shared the discussions and conclusions with the larger group. Common concerns among the three groups were assessment, aligning of standards, professional development, scientifically based research, the balance between phonics and comprehension, budgets, and lack of resources.

AACTE Reading Update
Following the group discussions on NCLB, Dr. Edyth Young, director of NCREL's Center for Literacy, discussed the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's (AACTE) Focus Council on Literacy, whose purpose is to help teacher preparation programs prepare early childhood teachers to teach literacy. The council has been charged with contributing to a special edition of the *Journal of Teacher Education* and authoring a white paper stating a platform endorsed by AACTE.

Literacy Product Review
After the AACTE reading update, literacy staff members Peggy Grant and Danielle Carnahan discussed NCREL's product review system and distributed sign-up sheets for those who may be interested in reviewing literacy products. They explained that all products must pass through a rigorous NCREL process before dissemination to the public.

Regional Literacy Network E-Mail List
Literacy staff members Peggy Grant and Cathy Voss introduced an e-mail list, which will provide network members with an opportunity to continue collaborative efforts focused on strategic planning for literacy achievement and to facilitate ongoing discussions of the NCLB Act. Participants were given sign-up sheets and instructions on how to use the e-mail list.

Afternoon Session

Cross-States Collaborative Activities

NCREL Associate Director Larry Friedman addressed the future direction of the Regional Literacy Network. He emphasized that NCREL strives to help all students become literate and that assistance can be provided through core support strategy to the network. He encouraged RLN members to let literacy staff members know how they can assist them—especially with regard to implementation of the NCLB Act-- and how they can make the network productive for its members.

NCREL facilitator Judy Caplan explained that the task for the afternoon session included looking at a set of six critical issues identified by network members during last year's annual meeting, and developing strategic plans for addressing those issues. Network members were asked to divide into groups according to their professional roles—administrators, state department representatives, teachers, principals, and those from higher education.

The critical issues were (1) assessment, (2) balanced literacy, (3) what works for teaching reading, (4) linguistics, (5) struggling readers, and (6) professional development.

Caplan explained that the participants' first task was to prioritize the issues and select the three they considered most important. The second task was to answer the following questions for each issue selected:

- What initiatives are currently underway in your state?
- In formulating strategies, what factors specific to your state would you need to consider?
- What resources do you have for planning and implementing these strategies?
- What strategies would you propose for an action plan to address assessment and accountability?

Development of a strategic plan required describing action steps, individuals responsible, start date, due date, and resources available. The three most common issues chosen by the groups were professional development, what works for teaching reading, and struggling readers. Participants addressed the above questions based on the issues they selected, and they designed a strategic plan for implementation.

Following the collaborative sessions, a representative shared each group's strategic plans with the other groups.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Participants were asked to complete a written evaluation of the meeting. In conclusion, Associate Director Larry Friedman thanked members for their input and contributions.

Reference

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read.* Retrieved November 29, 2002, from http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.htm

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